

TOPEKA DAILY CAPITOL
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A fine line in secrecy

There's a "very fine line" between too much secrecy and too little.

Too much, Admiral Stansfield Turner told newsmen, can impede justice or staunch the flow of information. Too little can give away data vital to our nation.

Turner should know, for his Central Intelligence Agency has been pressed in recent years to be more open. Revelations about past deeds of CIA and FBI led to demands they be better regulated and Congress and the public know more about their deeds.

This is reasonable, to a point. But an intelligence agency, by its very nature, cannot operate entirely in the light. It must protect identities of its agents and its sources, those who provide information.

Turner said the danger of disclosing sources is the No. 1 threat to the American intelligence community.

Our allies are losing confidence that CIA can keep a secret. Some hold back information. One withdrew a proposal for a joint covert action that would have helped both nations. Turner had to tell him it must be revealed to eight congressional committees. The ally knew there would be a leak somewhere.

Agents who risk their lives to work with the CIA fear their names will be revealed in the American press.

Turner appealed to newsmen not to reveal leaked information harmful to CIA.

"No government, no business, no newspaper, no private individual can conduct his life or business without some element of secrecy," Turner said.

Sensational leaks from CIA may be thrilling to report or read. But publicizing them risks the loss of CIA efficiency in guarding our security.